

PERCEPTIONS OF MARITAL AND PARENTAL SATISFACTION AND ITS RELATION WITH PARENTAL ATTACHMENT IN PORTUGUESE LATE ADOLESCENTS

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Nowadays, it is clearly recognised the importance and influence of intimate relationships on individuals' psychological well being, particularly marital and parental relationships. The family system, which is composed by different subsystems – marital, parental, and filial –, is characterised by a multiplicity of relationships between its constitutive elements. The type of interactions established lead to constant complexification and development of these relationships.

It is clearly recognised the role of the family of origin in shaping the marital lives of the next generation by many family researchers (Bowen, 1986). Bowen (1986) postulated that the characteristics of the relationships established with the family of origin (e.g. the emotional atmosphere, interpersonal relationships patterns, role-related behaviors and expectations, and rules) serve as models for future family relationships and, therefore, are carried forward through a process of projection. In accordance to this, Sroufe and Fleeson (1986) pointed out that a person projects his or her representation of relationships, which are strongly shaped by earlier experiences, onto future social relationships. So, individuals which have psychological resources that can be used to promote relational functioning – for instance, a basic feeling of security and self-image, the ability of being responsive to needs, emotional regulation, self-efficacy feelings and enjoy intimacy – are more likely to establish intimate and supportive relationships with others (Bowen, 1978 ; KobaK & Sceery, 1988 in Vondra & Belsky, 1993). Shulman, Rosenheim & Knafo (1999) obtained consistent findings with the socialisation model, which claims that the family serves as a model for future marital relationships. Illustrating these findings, « adolescents in traditional families emphasise closeness and support and expect a more traditional role division in their future marital lives, whereas adolescents in egalitarian families seek more egalitarian role division ». Nevertheless, they state that the adoption of parental models is moderated by the quality of the attachment relationship with these models and by their need for attachment. Sroufe & Fleeson (1986) stated that child observation of and participation in his or her family relationships make them internalise basic expectations and attitudes towards the behaviour of their future marital partner.

Attachment theory has become a major area of research interest especially in what concerns its relevance for adult relationship functioning. Based on the work of Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1982) and Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978), attachment theory assumes that child's primary experiences of attachment are cognitively represented as internal « working models » of the self and others. These models combine expectations about self-worth and the accessibility and responsiveness of the primary caregiver in supporting and protecting. Constructed in the relationship with the primary caregiver, these mental working models are assumed to shape adult relationships in terms of expectations and behaviours.

Ainsworth et al. (1978) identified three patterns of child-caregiver attachment, namely, secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant. Hazen and Shaver (1987) applied these types of attachment to adult relationships, which were extended to four adult attachment patterns by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). They define attachment patterns considering the intersection of two dimensions, the positiveness of self (overall level of self-esteem and sense of worthiness) and the positiveness of others (overall level of interpersonal trust and the sense of acceptance and responsiveness from others). Each of the four patterns, secure (positive self, positive other), preoccupied (negative self, positive other), fearful (negative self, negative other) and dismissing (positive self, negative other) has distinct standards of emotional regulation and social interaction (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994).

According to the attachment theory, the quality of adolescents' attachment relationships with their parents affects the process of internalization of parental models. In the present study, the aim is to analyse adolescents' attachment styles to their parents and its relations with the way in which they perceive their parents' marital and parental satisfaction. In fact, adolescents' perceptions of their parents satisfaction derived from the marital and parental roles are incorporated in their working models. So, we expect that individuals with high levels of secure attachment would, presumably, perceive more satisfying experience derived from their parents' family roles, contrasting with the insecure ones.

1. METHOD

1.1 Sample

The sample consists of 260 Portuguese adolescents and young adults from intact families (whose biological parents were still married to each other), 81 males and 179 females, mean age 19.40 (sd = 2.23), university students (60%) and non university students (40%).

1.2 Instruments

Self-report questionnaires were administered in order to assess adolescents' perceptions of their parents' marital and parental satisfaction and the way in which they characterise the attachment relationships established with their parents.

Scale of Evaluation of Satisfaction in Areas of Marital Life. Perceptions of parents' marital satisfaction were assessed using an adapted version of the Scale of Evaluation of Satisfaction in Areas of Marital Life (SESAML, Narciso, I. & Costa, M. E., 1996) This is a 34 item questionnaire distributed along two subscales, Love and Function. Subjects rated separately perceptions of their father and mother satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from « nothing satisfied » to « completely satisfied ».

Parental Comparison Level Index. Perceptions of parents' satisfaction with parenthood were assessed with an adapted version of Parental Comparison Level Index (PCLI, Waldron-Henessey, R. & Sabatteli, R. M., 1997), a 62 items questionnaire, containing the Reward and Cost subscales. For each of the scale's items, participants were asked to position themselves on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from « nothing satisfied » to « completely satisfied », separately for father and mother. The PCLI was initially translated

to Portuguese and discussed with people with a good knowledge of English and then transformed in an adolescent version in order to assess their perceptions of parents' satisfaction concerning their parental role.

Questionnaire of attachment to parents. The attachment relationships with parents were also assessed by the Questionnaire of Attachment to Parents (QAP, Matos, P. M. ; Milheiro Almeida, H. & Costa, M. E., 1998). This is a 44-item questionnaire scoring separately for father and mother on 6-point Likert scale. Answers range from « totally disagree » to « completely agree ». It is composed by three principal factors, namely, Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality, Quality of Emotional Bond and Separation Anxiety and Dependency.

1.3 Procedure

The instruments were administered, according to standard instructions in regular school class periods.

2. RESULTS

2.1 Factor analyses

Exploratory principal components factor analyses with *varimax* rotation were computed for the questionnaires SESMAL and PCLI in order to identify the underlying dimensions in our versions. Results replicate the authors' original structure. Confirmatory factor analyses were performed for the QAP's scales, showing a good data fit with the model.

2.2 Internal Consistency

Cronbach's alpha for each of the derived factors yielded the coefficients presented in Table 1. All coefficients are high, showing good internal consistency.

Table 1. Internal Consistency of scales of the QAP, SESMAL and PCLI questionnaires (Cronbach's alpha)

Sub-scales	N° of items	Father	Mother
		Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha
QAP			
Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality	13	.898	.896
Quality of Emotional Bond	8	.837	.810
Separation Anxiety and Dependency	7	.646	.662
SESMAL			
Love	17	.957	.961
Function	7	.754	.778
PCLI			
Rewards	33	.966	.962
Costs	24	.953	.950

2.3 Analyses of differences

Differences according to adolescents' gender

T tests for independent-samples were conducted in order to determine the differences existing as a result of gender in the assessed dimensions. Means, standard deviations, *t* and *p* values are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Analysis of differences by gender : Means, standard deviations, *t* and *p* values

	Male		Female			
	M	SD	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality to Father	36.477	11.554	34.402	12.130	1.297	.196
Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality to Mother	35.296	10.559	32.730	11.925	1.663	.097
Quality of Emotional Bond to Father	38.776	7.754	42.463	4.838	- 3.946	.000**
Quality of Emotional Bond to Mother	40.079	6.260	43.569	4.390	- 4.538	.000**
Separation Anxiety and Dependence to Father	21.839	5.359	24.477	5.338	- 3.685	.000**
Separation Anxiety and Dependence to Mother	22.127	5.215	25.299	5.605	- 4.317	.000**
Love Satisfaction of Father	75.845	15.328	78.108	15.358	-1.101	.272
Love Satisfaction of Mother	74.204	16.709	75.603	17.269	-.611	.542
Function of Father	30.379	5.468	29.903	5.297	.666	.506
Function of Mother	28.386	6.045	27.777	5.788	.774	.440
Rewards of Father	127.589	21.463	137.417	19.101	- 3.694	.000**
Rewards of Mother	130.002	21.423	140.399	17.051	- 3.851	.000**
Costs of Father	80.288	16.469	80.981	16.839	- .309	.757
Costs of Mother	80.727	16.538	81.809	16.364	- .492	.623

***p* < .001

Regarding the attachment dimensions, significant differences emerged for gender, indicating that females scored higher than males on mother's Quality of Emotional Bond, on mother's Anxiety Separation and Dependence, on father's Quality of Emotional Bond, and on father's Anxiety Separation and Dependence.

No significant gender differences were found on the subscales concerning the perceptions of parents' marital satisfaction.

On the parental satisfaction dimensions, significant differences were found indicating that females perceive higher Rewards of Father and Rewards of Mother than males.

Differences according to parents' gender

Paired-samples *t* tests were calculated to determine gender differences on the dimensions. Means, standard deviations, *t* and *p* values are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Analysis of differences by gender of parent : Means, standard deviations, t and p values

	Father		Mother		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	M	DP	M	DP		
Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality	35.048	11.970	33.529	11.558	3.593	.000**
Quality of Emotional Bond	41.315	6.131	42.482	5.289	- 4.870	.000**
Separation Anxiety and Dependency	23.656	5.473	24.311	5.671	- 4.500	.000**
Love	77.403	15.355	75.167	17.077	5.200	.000**
Function	30.051	5.345	27.967	5.864	7.540	.000**
Rewards	134.355	20.342	137.161	19.101	- 4.675	.000**
Costs	80.766	16.696	81.472	16.394	- 2.726	.007**

**p<.001

For the attachment dimensions, significant differences were found for parents' gender, revealing that subjects scored higher (a) on father's Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality when compared to the same dimension on the mother's scale, (b) on mother's Quality of Emotional Bond compared to father's one, and (c) on mother's Anxiety Separation and Dependence compare to father's one.

Concerning the perceptions of parents' marital satisfaction, adolescents perceived father's Love and father's Function higher than mother's ones.

On the perceptions of satisfaction with parenthood, adolescents scored higher on the perception of mother's Rewards and mother's Costs when compared to the father's.

Differences according to parental attachment

Clusters' analysis procedures (K-Means and Simple Euclidean Distance) were made to evaluate existence of specific configurations in dimensions' organisation. Cluster analyses for father and mother attachment revealed four differentiated groups, interpreted as the four prototypes suggested by Kim Bartholomew (see Table 4 and Table 5).

Table 4. Clusters analyses for father and multivariate results

	Secure n=79	Dismissing n=5	Preoccupied n=116	Fearful n=60
Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality	22.00	63.60	34.79	50.34
Quality of Emotional Bond	45.60	22.20	41.72	36.49
Separation Anxiety and Dependence	24.81	15.20	23.80	22.57

Table 5. Clusters analyses for mother and multivariate results

	Secure n=86	Dismissing n=67	Preoccupied n=68	Fearful n=39
Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality	21.82	38.81	31.80	53.29
Quality of Emotional Bond	45.58	39.01	44.30	38.44
Separation Anxiety and Dependence	23.35	22.02	29.02	22.16

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted for adolescents' perceptions of parents' marital and parental satisfaction as dependent variables revealing significant differences among clusters. Pillai's Trace indicated significant differences for styles of attachment to father ($F(3, 260) = 6.608, p < .001$) and styles of attachment to mother ($F(3, 260) = 6.874, p < .001$). Considering the styles of attachment to father, follow-up analyses of variance on each dimensions revealed significant differences across Perception of Father's Love ($F(3, 260) = 5.507, p = .001$), Perceptions of Mother's Love ($F(3, 260) = 6.024, p = .001$), and Perception of Father's Rewards ($F(3, 260) = 8.062, p < .001$). Scheffé follow-up contrasts showed that Secure attachment to father revealed a higher level on Perception of Father's Love than Fearful, Dismissing and Preoccupied ones. On Perception of Father's Love not only the secure ones scored higher than the other types, but also the Preoccupied scored higher than the Fearful. Concerning the Perception of Father's Rewards, Secure individuals revealed a higher level than Dismissing, who scored higher than Fearful. The Preoccupied ones also scored higher than the Dismissing subjects did.

Considering the styles of attachment to mother, follow-up analyses of variance revealed significant differences across Perception of Father's Functionality ($F(3, 260) = 3.700, p = .012$), Perceptions of Father's Rewards ($F(3, 260) = 4.357, p = .005$), and Perception of Mother's Rewards ($F(3, 260) = 7.336, p < .001$). Scheffé follow-up contrasts showed that on Perception of Father's Functionality the Secure individuals scored higher than the Dismissing ones. On the Perception of Father's and Mother's Rewards Secure attachment revealed a higher level than Dismissing and Fearful. On the other hand, the Preoccupied attachment scored higher than Dismissing and Fearful.

2.4 Correlation study

In order to explore the degree in which all of these dimensions were associated, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient was computed. Table 6 presents the correlation matrix obtained.

Table 6.

	Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality of Father	Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality of Mother	Quality of Emotional Bond with Father	Quality of Emotional Bond with Mother	Separation Anxiety and Dependence to Father	Separation Anxiety and Dependence to Mother	Perception of Fathers Love	Perceptions of Mothers Love	Perception of Fathers Function	Perception of Mothers Function	Perception of Fathers Rewards	Perception of Mothers Rewards	Perception of Fathers Costs	Perception of Mothers Costs
Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality of Father														
Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality of Mother	.833**													
Quality of Emotional Bond with Father	- .592**	- .443**												
Quality of Emotional Bond with Mother	- .447**	- .517**	.780**											
Separation Anxiety and Dependence to Father	- .173**	- .069	.330**	.228**										
Separation Anxiety and Dependence to Mother	- .062	- .103	.201**	.295**	.912**									
Perception of Fathers Love	- .398**	- .255**	.429**	.319**	.209**	.135*								
Perception of Mothers Love	- .434**	- .253**	.478**	.265**	.249**	.131*	.914**							
Perception of Fathers Functionality	- .187**	- .173**	.252**	.177**	.059	.017	.604**	.503**						
Perception of Mothers Functionality	- .305**	- .217**	.331**	.172**	.155*	.073	.609**	.685**	.687**					
Perception of Fathers Rewards	- .437**	- .315**	.637**	.490**	.269**	.154*	.608**	.599**	.404**	.444**				
Perception of Mothers Rewards	- .342**	- .388**	.528**	.616**	.208**	.224**	.521**	.463**	.374**	.373**	.881**			
Perception of Fathers Costs	- .190**	- .097	.214**	.160*	.026	- .048	.400**	.373**	.309**	.257**	.544**	.477**		
Perception of Mothers Costs	- .171**	- .137*	.200**	.198**	.006	-.032	.364**	.320**	.309**	.233**	.511**	.523**	.968**	

* Significant correlation at .05

** Significant correlation at .001

The correlation matrix shows that the dimensions are correlated, almost all statistically significant. From these results emerge that all dimensions of marital and parental satisfaction have significant negative relations with Inhibition of Exploration and Individuality and, by the other hand, are positively related with the Quality of Emotional Bond.

3. DISCUSSION

Consistent with previous research, differences were found in adolescents' attachment relationships with the mother and the father. As reported by Matos et al. (1999), the relationship adolescents established with the mother is more emotionally invested having less inhibition of exploration and individuality than the one established with the father. Although the relationship with the mother appears also to be a more dependent one. However, we shouldn't conclude that these findings mean that fathers are not important emotional figures to their children or aren't as competent in caregiving as mothers. These results can be related with our specific sociocultural context in which mothers' role is more associated with emotional and caring functions and, in turn, fathers' role seems to be more focused on instrumental aspects.

In what concerns adolescent's gender, females characterised their relationship with the father and with the mother as presenting greater *quality of emotional bond* than males did, but also reported to have higher *separation anxiety and dependence* with both parents than did males. These data seem to be consistent with previous research that presents girls more associated with the preoccupied style of attachment (Matos et al., 1999). In fact, it is also interesting to relate these findings with the Portuguese culture where parents seem to behave differently toward their sons and daughters: families tend to foster autonomy and independence of males, while assuming a protective attitude towards females.

Gender differences were also found concerning the parental satisfaction in terms of the perceptions of *rewards* of parenthood, revealing that females seem to perceive both parents more satisfied than males, which can be explained by the traditional affective, emotional and communication characteristics associated with the female gender.

Considering parents gender, adolescents perceive fathers as being more satisfied in marital dimensions than mothers, while on dimensions of satisfaction with parenthood mothers were perceived as being more satisfied than fathers. This could be related with the traditional family roles of a more communicative and expressive mother, even concerning a marital relationship, as well as more responsible for education issues.

Secure attachment style seems to be associated with greater perceptions of satisfaction with parents' family roles (marital and parental).

The positive and significant relation of *Quality of Emotional Bond* with dimensions of marital and parental satisfaction indicates that a more secure parental relationship is associated with greater perception of marital and parental satisfaction of their parents.

Carranza & Kilman (2000) found positive correlations between a secure attachment pattern and self-concept, good father characteristics, and doting mother characteristics. On the other hand, the insecure attachment pattern was associated with lower self worth, less interpersonal trust, distant and demanding father characteristics, and absent mother

characteristics. Shulman, Rosenheim & Knafo (1999) obtained results that showed that parental married expectations accounted for the marital expectations of their adolescent sons and daughters, being this association moderated by adolescents' quality of attachment. Harvey & Byrd (2000) found that individuals with high levels of secure attachment perceived their families as using more active coping strategies, while individuals with high levels of anxious/ambivalent attachment perceived their families as using a passive appraisal coping strategy.

These findings seem to confirm the importance of marital and parental satisfaction perceptions of adolescents to the development of secure attachment relationships, and consequently the promotion of adolescents' exploration, individuation and autonomy. In fact, more important than knowing if adolescents parents marital and parental roles are lived with satisfaction, is the way in which adolescents perceived it that facilitates the construction of working models which allow them to have more positive and healthy relationships with the others.

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